Vlad Bănățeanu (1900-1963)

First indianists of the XIX *century in Rumania*

București
30 iulie 2025

First indianists of the XIX century in Rumania[1]

The huge interest for all matters concerning India, which had been aroused in Western Europe by the "discovery of India" by an Englishman, Sir W. Jones, who, in 1789, had translated Kālidasa's "Śakuntalā", had reached by that time, the Rumanian Principalities.

In the West, the interest for. India had increased after Rucker's translation of the "Nala and Damayantī" (1828), of the "Sāvitrī" (1839), and after the publishing of his book on "The Brahman's Wisdom" (1836-1839), which had been preceded at a short interval by Fr. Bopp's famous "Comparative Grammar of Sanskrit and Zend languages" and so on. The scanty informations which had reached the Rumanian Principalities at the beginning of the XIX century, probably through the Transylvanian press, show up in the different notes with reference to India's history, geography, culture and art, which were published steadily from 1837 onwards in the weekly "Foaia Duminicii', from 1838 onwards in "Curierul de ambe sexe" and "Alauta Romineasca", and from 1839 in "Curierul Rominesc", as also during the following years, in a few other periodicals.

The studies of Heliade Radulescu and Gheorghe Asachi, who were famous authors during 1828 and 1877, also widened the knowledge about India; both of them published a large number number of of text-books on history, geography etc., containing a certain amount of data about India. The interest shown for India by Gh. Asachi is explained by the fact that his father, Leon Asachi, had already published a translation of "The Indian Hut" (1821).

From these first endeavours however, to a scientific treatment of problems concerning India's language and culture, religion and philosophy, there was still a long way. During these years, the problems of the Sanskrit language did not form the object of Rumanian philologists of that day. The libraries in Bucharest and Jassy however, contained already at the beginning of the second half of the last century, a series of works related to Indianistics or to oriental studies in general; this is shown by the catalogue of the "Biblioteca Colegiului National" in Bucharest, which had been made by I. Gentilie in 1847.

It is only as late as the the second half of the XIX century that a few Rumanian philologists begin to use the knowledge of Sanskrit in their studies. We refer specially to Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who had studied Sanskrit at the University of Lwow (a town belonging to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire), where Sanskrit studies at that time, as in the whole of Western Europe, were already quite advanced.

Another Sanskritist was Lazar Saineanu, a pupil of B.P. Hasdeu; we will also mention C.D. Georgian, Vasile M. Burla, Vasile Pogor and Teohari Antonescu. Some of these were philologists, others studied problems concerning Indian literature, culture and philosophy. They must be considered as the pioneers of Indianis-

1 *The Indo-Asian Culture*. New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, vol. VII, nr. 5, 1959, pp. 275-282.

tic studies in our country. They gave place during the first half of the XX century to another group of young Sanskritists.

B.P. Hasdeu's inclination towards the study of the Sanskrit language had of course been greatly encouraged by his father, Alexandru Hasdeu who was interested in these studies himself. It is known that he had studied Fr. Bopp's comparative grammar, and a note has been found mentioning his translation of it into Russian.

In some of the more important works of B.P. Hasdeu, in which he studies problems of Sanskrit literature or linguistics, he gives the etymology of a number of words and compares them with Sanskrit terms. From the year 1874 onwards, the review "Columna lui Traian" published his "Principie de filologia comparativa". It was in the same periodical that he also published in the following years a series of articles and excerpts, in which he reveals a deep knowledge of the the Sanskrit language and its literature.

It is interesting to note the fact that the authorities did not look favourably upon the interest shown by Rumanian scholars for oriental world, including India. A proof of this lack of enthusiasm is the fact that in 1874, the Ministry for Public Instruction had suspended the course of comparative philology which B.P. Hasdeu had inaugurated; by this course, he had sought to make accessible to a large audience the problems of Indo-Iranian languages. The suspension lasted for two years. This lack of understanding on the part of school authorities was also proved in in 1876 when another specialist of Sanskrit, Vasile Burla, asked to be granted the permission to start a free course of Sanskrit at Bucharest University. He did not obtain this permission.

Discussions had at one time arisen as to the knowledge B.P. Hasdeu had of the Sanskrit language. We believe however that the use he made of Sanskrit quotations in the the argumentation of his theses, the reviews of books he published, as well as the the list of works on Indianistics he had studied, are sufficient proof of his deep knowledge of this language.

It is interesting to note that the Sanskrit grammars well as the the grammars of modern Indian languages belonging to B.P. Hasdeu's personal library in Campina, which are now in the possession of the Library of the R.P.R. Academy, are full of marginal notes and comments by his own hand.

Lazar Saineanu was a disciple of B.P. Hasdeu and seconded him as his substitute for lectures between 1890 and 1892. After having having finished his in Rumania, he went to Paris where he studied Sanskrit at the Sorbonne with Abel Bergaigne. Although he knew Sanskrit well, Lazar Saineanu seldom used his knowledge of this this language and its literature in his works. He was more interested in the study of oriental influence upon Rumanian literature and folklore.

Another noteworthy Sanskrit scholar is C.D. Georgian, the first lecturer of Sanskrit language at the University of Bucharest; his capacity as a Sanskritist has been described in the review "Convorbiri Literare" (1907) by his intimate friend T. Iordanescu.

Born in 1850, C.D. Georgian, after taking his scholarship at the University of Bucharest in 1872, was sent to Paris to complete his studies. Here he was the pupil of Gaston Paris for Romanic languages, of Breal for comparative grammar, and of Abel Bergaigne for Sanskrit. In 1875, he studied Sanskrit in Leipzig with Professor Brockhaus. Although his studies included comparative grammar and Sanskrit philology, his thesis for a Doctor's Degree, published in 1876, treats of Rumanian vocalism. In 1876, a notice appears in "Columna lui Traian", announcing that C.D. Georgian will inaugurate a course of Sanskrit language at the University of Bucharest. It is almost certain that this course, owing to the fact that C.D. Georgian was sent abroad as secretary to the Rumanian Legation in Berlin, could no longer have been held that year. In Berlin, he started to work with Professor Albrecht Weber, at the editing of a few Sanskrit texts. In 1877 however, he was recalled, and on coming back, was given a class of Latin at the Nifon Seminary. For a few years he held a series of lectures and at last in 1883, he was officially allowed to hold a free course of Sanskrit. The information we have concerning these lectures is not clear, but we may safely assume that given by T. Iordanescu who was Georgian's best friend up to the time of his death in 1904, is the most reliable. According to it, the lectures were attended by a few of B.P. Hasdeu's own pupils. Among these, the most enthusiastic was Lazar Saineanu. We do not know what became of C.D. Georgian's private library or of his manuscripts left over at his death.

It is a well-known fact that Vasile Pogor as well as Vasile M. Burla belonged to the literary circle "Junimea". The circumstance of T. Maiorescu, a literary critic and president of this circle, having had a certain amount of knowledge of Indianistics, especially as to literature and Buddhist philosophy (as we see in his brief notes on Sanskrit studies in "Convorbiri Literare", 1866), thoroughly explains the fact that many studies on Indianistics appear in this periodical. These are especially concerned with literature, history, culture and religion. Most of these studies were published by the members of this literary circle; among them we mention Vasile Pogor, Vasile Burla, and the remarkable scholar who was a pupil of the scholar and author Al. Odobescu: Teohari Antonescu. The great number of studies in Indianistics which were published in this paper may be due to the fact too, that most "Junimists" had made their studies in Germany and were familiar with the problems of Indianistics and with Sanskrit language and literature. Informations and details on Vasile Pogor and his studies on Buddhism are to be found in the "Memoirs of Junimea", published by I. Negruzzi and Gh. Panu. Vasile Burla had studied Latin, Greek and Sanskrit at the Universities of Vienna and Graz. Upon coming back to his country he he had been appointed professor at a college. He had then asked, without success, to be allowed to hold a free course of Sanskrit. Upon his admission to the circle of the "Junimea", he published from 1876 to 1878 a series of articles, in which his theses were upheld by examples from Sanskrit.

Teohari Antonescu, after having made his studies in Paris, Heidelberg and Berlin, came back to his country in 1894. He was first appointed professor of

Greek at a secondary school, and then professor of archaeology at the University in Bucharest. His thesis for scholarship bore the title: "The cult of the the Habirs in Dacia" (1899). Among the studies he published in '"Convorbiri Literare", we mention: "A survey of the philosophy of the Upanishads" (XXVIII, 1894), and "Buddhism and the Nirvana" (XXXVII, 1903). His more important work is that on the philosophy of the Upanishads, the first to deal with such a problem in its entirety.

We find more and ample information concerning India in the second half of the last century; even textbooks contain wider reference to India's history, philosophy, literature and art.

This school of Indianists continues its activity during the first half of the present century when there appear a number of Indianists too. Among these we will mention C.D. Georgian's friend, T. Iordanescu who died only a few years ago (in 1954). He had studied in Halle with Professors Pischel, R. Schmidt and Hultzsch. He was one of the first Rumanians to take an active part at a congress of Orientalists, that is, at the Congress which was held in Oxford in 1928. To this congress he contributed a paper about the Gypsies. His works, among which will mention a study of the Indian drama, were published in "Convorbiri Literare". Another Indianist worth mentioning is Ioan Mihalcescu who published in 1920 a study of over 400 pages: "The law of Manu, or the Religions and Institutions of India".

Among the younger generation of orientalists are a few Indianists, viz Th. Simensky, professor at Jassy University, known by his translation of the Pañcatantra, the Mahābhārata, the Kaṭha-Upanishad, the Muṇḍaka-Upanishad, the Bhagavadgītā, Pururavas and Urvaśī, as well as other works. At present he is publishing a grammar of Sanskrit and other translations from the Pañcatantra.

Aram Frenkian and Vlad Banateanu have both studied in Paris with A.M. Meillet, Jules Bloch and Louis Finot. They returned to their own country and carried out studies in different branches; the former on oriental philosophy, the latter on comparative philology and orientalistics. Aram Frenkian published: "Puruṣa-Gayomard-Anthropos", in "Revue des Etudes Indo-Européennes" in 1943; "Punarmṛtyu et la seconde mort" in "Revue des Etudes Etudes Indo-Européennes", 1943; "La théorie du sommeil d' après les Upaniṣads etet le Yoga" in "Studia et Acta Orientalia", I, 1957; and "Greek Scepticism and the Indian Philosophy" (1957). Vlad Banateanu published a series of articles on Indian literature and a monograph on Tagore (in press); present he prepares another monograph: "Kālidāsa and his work".

Some younger orientalists viz. Dr. S. Al. George, A. Rosu, A. Frenkian and Th. Simensky have published several studies.

Today the circumstances leading to the development of Indian studies in Rumania are more favourable than ever in the past. Rumanian Indianists will do their utmost to develop cultural relations with India and to form new elements which will dedicate themselves to the study of Ancient India and of the linguistic, literary and artistic realities of of Modern India.